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ABSTRACT

As part of a study of the cultural and societal factors influencing alcohol use and abuse and variations in drinking patterns among California's Spanish speaking population, ethnographic research was conducted in three separate communities. In this paper, the design and methodology (including participant observation), and some of the results of the ethnographic data collection are outlined. Settings in which drinking takes place among Mexican Americans are described. The varying degree and manner in which Mexican American women were participants in drinking scenarios are used to demonstrate some of the cultural contrasts and influences in drinking behavior. A positive correlation was found between a woman's active participation in public drinking activities and her acculturation as assessed by language, dress and, if known, generation (in terms of immigration). The implications of differences in norms and sex role behavior accompanying acculturation are mentioned as they relate to alcoholism programs. The importance to social service delivery of the types of information which may be gained by ethnography is stressed. (Author/GC)

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A FIVE WEEK ALCOHOLISM ETHNOGRAPHY CONDUCTED IN THREE SPANISH SPEAKING COMMUNITIES*

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My experiences in the last two years have led me to believe that there are increasing opportunities for anthropologists to work as team members on problem oriented, cross-disciplinary research. In such situations, the role of the anthropologist may vary: he or she may be in charge of a segment of research which is to be integrated with non-anthropological data or, on the other hand, the anthropologist may function simply as an advisor in the design of data gathering techniques or the interpretation of data. My discussion today is centered on an example of the first situation. I was asked by a research firm to design and implement a significant, though not major, segment of a state funded research project. The overall objectives of the research were to identify cultural and societal factors which influence alcohol use and abuse among Spanish speaking persons in California and, further, to determine the extent to which sub-groups within the Spanish speaking population varied in their drinking patterns and alcohol related behaviors.

The R.F.P. issued by the California State Board of Alcoholism outlined a plan which required both quantitative and qualitative data gathering. However, the qualitative or ethnographic research was not the primary focus of the study, though it was considered important for two reasons: first, it was to be implemented prior to the quantitative segment of the project and was expected to uncover or explore areas to be researched in that later household survey; and, secondly, the descriptive data generated in the ethnographic segment was to be used as context for the greater understanding of statistical data. The ethnographic data would provide insights into the natural settings for drinking and "on the ground" descriptions of drinking behavior and people's expressed attitudes toward alcohol and alcohol related behavior.

There are problems associated with having just a piece of the action, and the major problem I had was time: I had just two and a half months to design and implement a research strategy which would produce reasonably

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thorough descriptions of Spanish speaking populations in three widely scattered locales and which also would generate substantive data on the alcohol related norms, attitudes, and behaviors within each of these locales. A rural Central Valley area was one of the locales; the other two were urban complexes located in central and southern California.

It was clear, of course, that no one person could even sketchily cover all of these sites. The solution was to train research teams for each of the sites and adapt traditional ethnographic techniques for a team approach. The two most easily adaptable strategies, I felt, were the key informant interview and participant observation. However, if data was to be gathered by different individuals in different sites, some way to assure comparability of data across sites had to be built into the techniques used. The answer was to formalize both interviews and observations.

I developed an hour-and-a-half semi-structured format for the key informant interviews. The format called for open ended questions geared to get broad information on such things as social structural relations between majority and minority groups in each community and the extent and kind of intra-ethnic divisions within the minority group. Further, it probed informant perceptions relating to incidence of alcoholism in the Spanish speaking communities and among segments of the minority communities, cultural definitions of alcoholism, and culturally appropriate treatment modalities for Spanish speaking persons. Informants, primarily members of the minority communities, included social service personnel, priests, bartenders, liquor store operators, educators, law enforcement personnel, and community leaders.

Participant observation was restricted to settings and events where alcohol was sold and/or consumed. Each observation was reported in a detailed, nine page report form which insured that the observation was complete and that relevant variables had been noted for each site or event. Though the reports were naturally written up following observations, extensive questions on language patterns, dress, activities, scheduling, group composition, interactions, and conversations insured that in-depth reporting of each drinking scenario was obtained. Moreover, by focusing attention upon exactly the same details across sites, important contrasts and similarities in personnel, behavior, and sanctions could be assessed.

The observation formats proved to be especially successful tools,

yielding detailed descriptions of activity at commercial sites such as bars, cantinas and nightclubs; public gatherings like tardeadas, fund raising bailes, and barbeques; informal affairs such as picnics and parties; and festive events like weddings and baptisms.

Two bilingual, bicultural graduate level observer-interviewers, a man and a woman, were trained for work in each of the sites. Each one was familiar with the locale to which he or she was assigned. The fact that each was doing both interviewing and observing allowed for flexible and productive use of time; moreover, information gathered in interviews could be followed up on observations and vice versa. Additionally, the fact that the teams were male-female allowed a flexibility that was especially useful in the varying social settings usual for alcohol consumption. In five weeks time we were able to obtain 70 interviews and 35 observations in each site.

Findings

Both interviews and observations yielded corroborative insights, only a few of which can be discussed here.

Firstly, data obtained from informants made it clear that, structurally, all three of the communities were stratified, both with respect to divisions between majority and minority populations and intra-ethnically, but that stratification differed from locale to locale. The stratification mentioned in the interviews was observed to be replicated in the differentiation of clientele in the drinking sites of each setting. For example, in the Central Valley, it was clear that there were bars frequented primarily by Anglos, with only a small sprinkling of the Mexican American permanent residents--most often the Mexican American town officials or businessmen and sometimes their wives. Campesinos were clearly not welcome in these establishments. On the other hand, there were cantinas patronized solely by migrant compesinos. Among these cantinas there were further divisions: some cantinas catered to Tejano clientele, others to Mexicanos and California migrants.

In the urban locales, more differentiation among groups and drinking sites was observed: cocktail lounge-supper clubs patronized by ethnically heterogeneous groups or by middle and upper-middle class second and third generation Mexican American couples, neighborhood beer bars with a working class male patronage, "factory" bars with patrons which changed with the work shifts,

discos for young people and students, "wet tee shirt" bars where young and middle aged males, usually not of the immigrant generation, were entertained. In addition, in the urban locales there were gay bars, pinto bars where the clientele consisted primarily of ex-felons, cannery bars, and mariachi theatre clubs with a Mexicano patronage, to name only a few. Norms for drinking behavior and positive and negative sanctions, as well as organization of activities varied distinctly from place to place depending upon the clientele.

For brevity's sake, a single important factor, the degree and manner in which women were participants in the drinking scenarios, will demonstrate some of the cultural contrasts and influences on drinking behavior that we observed.

Key informants consistently asserted that, though traditional Mexican norms operated to severely censure public drinking on the part of women, the more acculturated second and third generation Mexican American women were increasingly seen to drink in public. Alcoholism service deliverers, while averring that alcohol abuse among the Mexican American population was primarily a male problem, spoke of a growing incidence of alcoholism among second and third generation women.

Observation produced some interesting insights into the inclusion of women in the drinking sites: women were involved in almost all public and private alcohol related scenes, but differences were quite obvious in terms of the way in which they were involved and the effects of their involvement. Escorted women, that is,women accompanied by dates or husbands, were rarely seen in drinking establishments with a solely Spanish speaking or Mexicano clientele. For example, women were part of the campesino cantina scenes in the rural towns, but only as bar maids or bar girls. Similarly, escorted women were rarely seen in urban neighborhood bars with strictly immigrant clientele. In supper clubs, discos, and restaurant bars in which both English and Spanish, or predominantly English was spoken, where mixed drinks were served, and where the clientele was ethnically heterogeneous or generationally heterogeneous, escorted women were a common sight. Obviously, there is an overlap and confusion of ethnic and class factors involved here, but the correspondence between class and generational distance from immigrant status is well documented in the literature (Sheldon, 1966; Penalosa, 1964). It appears,

then, that for acculturated Mexican American women, sanctions against public drinking are not stringent. The data on quantity and frequency of drinking later gathered in the quantitative survey upheld this relationship between acculturation and greater incidence of public drinking among women.

Interesting, however, was a finding readily apparent across observations but difficult to obtain by quantitative methods: we noted that at the drinking sites where escorted women were involved, many more restrictions appeared to prevail with respect to what was allowable behavior for men. Where women weren't escorted, fighting among men occurred much more frequently, sexual overtures to women present were not uncommon and were looked upon with tolerant amusement and accompanied by jibes from fellow drinkers, boisterous or stuporous behavior was seen to be tolerated or ignored. None of these behaviors were permitted to go on for any amount of time at places where escorted women were drinking. Moreover, at both public and private drinking sites where wives or dates participated in the drinking, they were often seen to curb or attempt to curb the quantity of liquor consumed by their escorts. In a number of instances, most notably at private parties, this role as inhibitor appeared to be endorsed by others who encouraged women to help "settle down" their mates or aid in persuading them to leave the scene if their drinking appeared likely to create problems. Such inhibiting interaction was not observed at sites dominated by unaccompanied men--either because no women were around to act as inhibitors or those women who were present were not seen to have the right to inhibit men's behavior.

It was clear from both interviews and observations, then, that there was a positive correlation between women's active participation in public drinking activities and acculturation, assessed by language, dress, and, if known, generation. It was also clear, from the observations, that this greater participation of women was accompanied by systematic changes in the behavior of men as the result of the operation of more restrictive norms in those sites. The irony may be that factors which operate, indirectly, to inhibit consumption among Mexican American men may stem from circumstances which result in greater consumption among Mexican American women.

A point consistently underscored by Spanish speaking informants was that alcoholism service deliverers for Spanish speaking problem drinkers <u>had</u> to be sensitive to the differences in norms and behavior which accompany variation in degree of acculturation because such differences are crucial in formulating

appropriate treatment modalities. Differences in sex role behaviors such as those noted above have important therapeutic implications. For example, traditionally, alcoholism therapy has involved the spouse of the alcoholic, but appropriate timing for the involvement of the spouse of a Spanish speaking drinker may depend upon careful assessment of the cultural acceptability of a woman's being involved in a husband's therapy. An understanding of role shifts which may accompany acculturation, such as those outlined above, may aid a therapist in evaluating individual cases and create a greater sensitivity to a Spanish speaking drinker's total milieu.

Clearly, there are kinds of data which are more readily accessible through ethnographic techniques; it is, for example, difficult to acquire information about complex and subtle interactions using survey techniques. As important, the holistic descriptions of anthropology provide a meaningful context which allows a more useful interpretation of the discrete items and correlations produced by quantitative data gathering.

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